

status Report

The Quarterly Newsletter on
Disability Issues in Alberta

THE PREMIER'S COUNCIL ON THE STATUS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

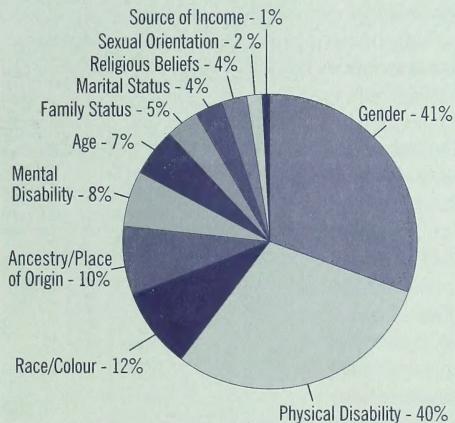
NOVEMBER 1999

Disability and Discrimination

Disability complaints still dominate commission's workload

It's a sobering reminder that equality remains elusive for people with disabilities.

In the fall issue of its quarterly newsletter *The Citizen*, the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission released its statistics for its 1998-99 fiscal year. At a combined 48%, complaint files



opened on the basis of discrimination over physical and mental disability dominated all other types of complaints during the year.

The pie chart shows the distribution of complaints opened by the ground of discrimination. The percentages in the chart total more than 100% because some complainants allege discrimination on more than one ground. Physical disability represents 40% while mental disability represents 8% of the total complaints.

"Physical and mental disability complaints combined represent a significant component of the commission's work," write the newsletter's authors. "The commission is undertaking research to help better understand what underlies this caseload and what action the commission can take to address it."

During the reporting period, the commission received more than 45,000 phone calls. Many callers were referred to other agencies, while others were able to resolve matters on their own. Ultimately, the commission opened 731 complaint files, an increase from 674 complaint files opened the previous year.

Parking Policy for Albertans with Disabilities Under Review

The number of disability parking placards issued in Alberta has increased dramatically from 20,000 in 1992 to 70,000 in 1999.

Stakeholders have complained that those in most need of handicapped parking stalls often find them occupied by persons with questionable needs.

In 1998, the Advisory Committee on Barrier Free Transportation established a Subcommittee on Parking Placards for Persons with Disabilities.

After a review, the subcommittee determined that there are several major issues related to the parking placards:

- eligibility criteria are too broad
- physicians are inconsistent in approval

- use of parking stalls is poorly enforced
- some placard holders and non-placard holders do not know the rules on proper use
- parking stalls are poorly signed
- number of parking stall spaces is inadequate.

The subcommittee recommended that the policy be updated for the first time since 1992. It has developed a proposal to consult with affected organizations in one-day group forums in Edmonton and Calgary. They will be asked to suggest ways of ensuring that those with the greatest need can find the parking stalls they require.

To get involved, contact Sara Wong, Alberta Infrastructure, at 780/427-9781.

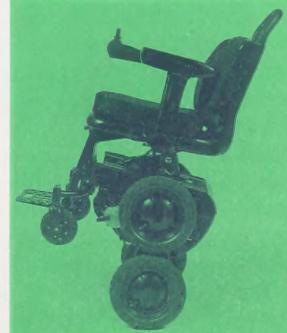
Blueprint for Business

The Premier's Council recently unveiled a new three-year business plan—see details on page 2.



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NOT JUST STANDING AROUND:
Meet IBOT, a new wheelchair that does just about everything. See page 4 for more information.

Council Unveils Ambitious Business Plan

The Council recently completed an ambitious three-year business plan to complement its restructuring and new mandate.

Last fall, the Premier's Council began its process of renewal. A new five-year mandate was granted, Council members were appointed or reappointed, and key personnel were found to fill out the Secretariat's staff.

Knowing it was far from business as usual, the Council's first task was to determine how best to use its resources for maximum impact over the course of its extended mandate. We reached out to as many stakeholders as possible for advice—representatives from the disability community, government leaders and program managers, and recent past Council members.

If we all continue to take ownership of the Council's work, the goals will be realized.

What we learned was summarized in April at a Strategic Planning Workshop. There, Council members and staff sifted through responses and arrived at a draft positioning document. This draft was sent back to the same stakeholders for additional feedback.

After fine-tuning during the summer, we finally arrived at our three-year business plan—a formal document that summarizes our guiding principles and the actions we will take based on those principles.

Specifically, our business plan provides a set of principles that guide our work, the essence of which is contained in this para-

graph: "The Premier's Council regularly reviews the visions, goals and aspirations of the many organizations that form Alberta's disability community. We join with the representative groups in the collective pursuit of equal citizenship and full access to opportunity for persons with disabilities. Full status is the goal, implying full inclusion and participation in the social, economic and political life of Alberta communities."

The business plan then provides a vision of how the Council sees itself helping these principles become reality—through acting as a catalyst with a powerful voice and a leadership mandate as it helps set standards for policy affecting persons with disabilities.

Following this, the business plan acknowledges the importance of acting on opportunity at this point in time, given the uncertainty and constant change in support programs for persons with disabilities. The plan describes three priority challenges that have been accepted for the life of the business plan:

- "walking the talk" by moving beyond discussion into action—in this case, the main action taken will be to help the Alberta government develop a Provincial Disability Strategy to complement the developing Federal Disability Strategy.
- influencing government restructuring—with government embracing change and new approaches, the Council will strive to be "at the table" to ensure disability issues are "top of mind" as tomorrow's policies and plans are developing.
- bridge building and communications—since the real ex-



perts on disability are Albertans with disabilities themselves, the Council must seek to become a more effective conduit of communication between communities and policy makers.

From there, the business plan lays out its mission (to champion significant improvement in the status of Albertans with disabilities) and its core businesses: influencing policy development, being an effective advocate, and evaluating on an ongoing basis supports and services for Albertans with disabilities. It also describes in detail its goals and how it will reach them.

The business plan concludes with a section on evaluation. Ultimately, the success of the Council will be reflected in improved status for Albertans with disabilities. The plan provides a sample "report card" in which several key areas may be measured over the long term for improvement—workforce participation, for example. This section also describes a framework with other performance measures that could testify to the Council's effectiveness over the short term—for example, by asking relevant government departments to rate the Council's value in the first, second and third years of the plan.

The process of developing the business has not been an easy one. Nor will fulfilling this plan be an easy task—when I review it, I'm reminded of the enormity of the tasks it sets out for us. However, I'm heartened by this thought: as a Council, we alone are not solely responsible for it. It was developed with the input of a multitude of stakeholders beyond our Council—provincial

disability organizations, our most highly placed government leaders, disability program managers, and many more. As such, it reflects goals we all want to see achieved. If we all continue to take ownership of the Council's work, the goals will be realized.

To obtain a complimentary copy of the Council's business plan, please call our office at 780/422-1095 or toll-free 800/272-8841, or see our website.

Status Report

Editors: Elaine Chapelle, Carmen Grandmont, Cliff Bridges

Design and Production: Bridges Communications

Canadian Publication Mail Agreement No. 1518941

Status Report is published quarterly by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and is intended to provoke discussion of issues concerning persons with disabilities. This publication is also available on audio cassette by contacting our office at:

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Wanted: Your Views & Input

We have begun to take those crucial first steps towards involving Albertans in answering the question: Where do we go from here in addressing the needs and concerns of the disability community in Alberta?

By the time you read this, the first two of our Open Houses throughout the province have already taken place. But four more are scheduled for mid November to early December.

Historically, stakeholders have expressed the needs and concerns of persons with disabilities in Alberta extensively and exhaustively. The issues are not new, nor are they surprising—workforce participation, accessible transportation, affordable accessible housing, financial support and home care are just a few of the long-standing and still pertinent issues. So what do we want to find out from you—a group of people who have been consulted time and again?

Our province's evolving political, economical, and social environments are constantly impacting Albertans with disabilities in the above areas. In response to the recent government ministry changes, continuing development of three-year business plans, and interdepartmental collaboration initiatives, a Provincial Disability Strategy is crucial. Such a strategy will allow us to guide and monitor the practices of government departments and community initiatives. We believe this strategy should have visionary guiding principles, strategic priorities and clearly defined performance indicators—all with the ultimate goal of providing a level playing field for Albertans with disabilities.

But, as people with disabilities and organizations that represent people with disabilities, you are the experts, and we need to hear about the issues and concerns in your community that relate to the development of such a sweeping strategy.

Developing and implementing a Provincial Disability Strategy will demand a cohesive approach among all stakeholders—individuals, families, community organizations, professionals, and government.

And, as community stakeholders have indicated, more than consultations will be required to make such a strategy become reality. People with disabilities must be allowed to provide meaningful input and into identifying and prioritizing recommendations for action. Development of such a strategy must go beyond traditional issue identification and reiteration of our provinces' commitment to

In Union: A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians, the blueprint for a federal disability strategy.

What would our Provincial Disability Strategy look like? To begin with, many have already said that it should provide a framework for our government, complete with guiding principles, strategic priorities, a timetable for actions, and desired outcomes.

The strategy could provide key performance indicators that might be used to monitor improvements in the status of Albertans with disabilities. Preliminary stakeholder consultations have already provided several suggested performance indicators such as:

- comparison of workforce participation rates of persons with and without disabilities
- level of need for affordable, accessible public housing
- comparison of education levels of persons with and without disabilities
- number of persons with disabilities satisfied with key supports—financial, home care, etc.
- number of persons with disabilities taking part in public debate and policy development.

Naturally, this vision of a Provincial Disability Strategy is incomplete without your involvement. We want to know what you think it should look like and how it should be developed.

We believe that a Provincial Disability Strategy is an important goal for us to achieve together. If you agree, please come out to an Open House and lend your support and expertise.

Open House Locations

Bonnyville, Alberta - October 20, 1999
French Cultural Centre, 4904 - 50 Street
Time: 7:00pm - 10:30pm

High Level, Alberta - October 27, 1999
High Level Town Office, 9813 - 102 Street
Time: 7:00pm - 10:30pm

Grande Prairie, Alberta - November 10, 1999
The Grande Prairie Inn, 11633 Clairmont Road
Time: 7:00pm - 10:30pm

Edmonton, Alberta - November 17, 1999
Grant MacEwan Community College
10700 - 104 Avenue
Time: 7:00pm - 10:30pm

Calgary, Alberta - November 24, 1999
Foothills Academy, 745 - 37 Street, NW
Time: 7:00pm - 10:30pm

Medicine Hat, Alberta - November 25, 1999
Strathcona Centre, 1155 Street S.E.
Time: 7:00 - 10:30 pm

For information or reports stemming from the Open Houses, or if you would like to participate in any future events, please contact our office at 780/422-1095 or toll-free 800/272-8841 or visit our web-site (www.premierscouncil.ab.ca).



WHEELERS SUE BIG APPLE MARATHON

New York—America's most free thinking city? Not so, at least from the perspective of a group of wheelchair athletes.

Nine racers have filed a lawsuit against the New York Road Runners Club, organizers of the New York City Marathon. The suit charges the organizers with "bigotry and elitism which has caused humiliation and harm" to wheelchair athletes.

Two of the complainants are Miguel Such and Tony Nogueira, who, despite finishing first and second in the 1998 NYC Marathon, received no recognition or prize money (last year's winning fe-

male and male foot racers each won \$50,000 and a car). During that same race, wheelchair racers were stopped with no prior notice at the 14-mile mark and forced to wait for lead runners to pass. According to the complainants, this outrageous act is at the top of a long list of discriminatory incidents perpetrated by race organizers.

Allan Steinfeld, president of the New York Road Runners Club, continues to respond that the New York City course is not safe for wheelchair racers—despite the fact that wheelchair racers have competed with no serious injury since 1977.

Neurotrauma Connections '99:

The End or the Beginning?

Last year, the Canadian Paraplegic Association (CPA) Alberta Division and the Brain Injury Association of Alberta (BIAA) embarked upon a monumental task—collaborating in the creation of a symposium that would bring together researchers, rehabilitation professionals and injury prevention specialists. In late September, their work came to fruition.

The event was excellently organized and attended. Over 500 delegates from around the world attended the symposium and assistive technology trade show at Edmonton's Mayfield Inn and Conference Centre.

Delegates ranged from those who experience neurotrauma personally to those who study it on an intracellular level. The knowledge represented was impressive and broad in scope, and to all present, it appeared that the organizers' vision of "building new partnerships" was achieved. A month later, we have to ask ourselves to what extent this "connecting" occurred.

...the real story of "connecting" was told in the lunchrooms...

I don't think I've ever attended a conference that didn't leave the audience with some nostalgic rhetoric like "the end is only the beginning". Attendees of the wrap-up session, chaired by ReThink West's Ken Balmer, were probably expecting that sort of message. Instead, Balmer challenged the audience with his simple yet profound observations. He pointed out that, while research-

ers attended sessions on prevention, and rehab professionals took notes on research, and all agreed that one could not possibly exist without the other, the real story of connecting was told in the lunch-rooms. Sitting around the tables at the end of each session, be it noontime, dinner, or coffee between, researchers sat with researchers, rehabilitation professionals sat with rehabilitation professionals and prevention specialists with prevention specialists.

The point Balmer was attempting to make was that, in terms of relationships, no marriages were made. Though the matchmakers were well-meaning, it was suggested that we might have only made it to first—or perhaps second—base.

What happened next in that final session was surprising. The discussion panel and audience began creating solutions. Eric Boyd, National Managing Director of CPA, expressed the potential and promise in the leadership role of the Premier's Council. John Slater-Rooke, former Executive Director of BIAA, spoke of one individual's potential to change the mind of a cabinet minister. Bob Steadward, President of the International Paralympic Committee, emphasized the need for personal communication with one another. Tom Fowler discussed the Premier's Council's commitment to the development of a Provincial Disability Strategy beginning with the Open House initiative. Finally, after much discussion and determination to prove that Neurotrauma "Connections" had indeed been made, Mufty Matthewson, Board Member of BIAA and Symposium Co-Chair, addressed the panel.



In anticipation of potential funding and attention that brain injury was due to receive, Matthewson talked about the creation of a NeuroActive

Council. Its purpose would be to represent stakeholders from across the province in research, prevention, and rehabilitation, along with consumers, families, service providers and non-profit organizations. Such a Council could distribute funding such that provincial needs would be most appropriately met, as the stakeholders themselves would be setting the priorities.

Unfortunately, this article has a postscript that overshadows such optimism. At print deadline for the *Status Report*, BIAA is currently without an Executive Director, and Matthewson and almost half of the board have resigned. This leaves the organization—and any hopes for a unified approach to funding in the form of a NeuroActive Council—in a state of uncertainty.

Adequate neurotrauma prevention, research and rehabilitation requires funding. But funding does not precede collaboration—collaboration must be demonstrated before funding will be freely granted. You may think this to be an oversimplification of the truth, and you may be right, but empirically this has been demonstrated time and again in terms of financial supports for persons with disabilities. Like a big white elephant in the living room that no one will talk about, we can leave it unsaid—but everyone knows that true compromise, collaboration and partnering are sorely needed as we continue discussions in Alberta around brain injury and neurotrauma.

Who's On First?

Yet another mainstream sport has been reworked into a version for the disabled. While in its infancy, the game of wheelchair softball is growing in popularity in the U.S. Currently, about 25 teams (mostly in the mid-west) play during the summer, and up to 18 of those teams met in Minneapolis for the National Wheelchair Softball Association's national championship in late August.

The game's most dedicated following appears to be in Colorado. There, four teams play (and take part in post-game wisecracking and beer guzzling) every Sunday from April to August, and a junior team may be on the horizon. The fledgling league's success is due in no small part to the generosity of Colorado's young National League team, the Rockies. The Rockies have tossed in considerable financial support to get the league running. Not only that, the team has rolled up their sleeves in many other ways—top brass pitch in by driving van loads of players, making media contacts, and arranging for deep vendor equipment discounts.

Wheelchair softball is played on a diamond with bases 50 feet apart. The lines are 150 feet to each corner and 220 feet to centre field. Rules are similar to that of slow-pitch.

For more information, take a look at the National Wheelchair Softball Association's informative website (www.wheelchairsoftball.com).



Legal Help for Non-Profit Organizations

A program that provides pro bono legal services to community organizations has expanded into Alberta's two schools of law.

Pro Bono Students Canada (PBSC) now has a permanent home at the Faculties of Law of both the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary. This unique program allows law students to gain practical experience while contributing to the communities they live in.

Eligible non-profit agencies or public interest organizations are able to access the volunteer services of law students skilled in legal and policy research, writing and interviewing. Projects that PBSC volunteers can work on are usually legal in nature and must qualify as work for the public interest. Placements generally run from mid-September to December or mid-January to April, for approximately three hours per week. There are no charges for services provided.

PBSC is not able to provide law students to represent individual clients, or to give legal advice to individual clients. All work must be carried out under the guidance of a supervising lawyer who

carries liability insurance. Supervising lawyers are usually found by the organization through their existing links.

The program was developed in 1996 at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law. In 1998, the program was expanded to include all Ontario law schools. Since inception, hundreds of students have provided pro bono services to 85 agencies within the Toronto area, and over 80 agencies in four other Ontario cities. Examples of projects completed include preparing a student handbook on child abuse, researching legislation protecting endangered species, and presenting an information session on basic rights to street youth.

Earlier this year, a generous grant from the Kahanoff Foundation allowed the program to expand into Alberta, as well as British Columbia, Manitoba and New Brunswick.

In Alberta, PBSC is actively seeking organizations to assist. For more information, contact Pro Bono Students Canada at 780/492-1194 (University of Alberta Faculty of Law) or 403/220-2690 (University of Calgary Faculty of Law).

What can Pro Bono Students Canada do for eligible organizations?

- research legal issues relevant to the organization or their clients
- contribute to advocacy work on behalf of the organization
- research and write reports and policy papers
- re-draft board policy/manuals
- review new materials (Internet, recent case law, periodicals, and others)
- update resources
- perform public education, such as writing brochures or presenting workshops
- provide legal support and information to clients or organizations
- assist intakes and assessments.

What a Garden Party!

It's a magnificent testimonial to the power of volunteerism and community spirit.

On September 25, more than 200 City of Calgary employees descended en masse to volunteer their time at the new CNIB building in the Bridgeland community of northeast Calgary. There, as part of a United Way Day of Caring project, the employees completed work on a four-season fragrant garden on the grounds surrounding the building. Throughout the day, the volunteers completed an astonishing amount of work, planting trees, shrubs and some 1200 spring bulbs, painting fences and curbs, and installing benches.

Later in the day, Calgary Mayor Al Duerr and Dr. Euclid Herie, CEO of the CNIB and President of the World Blind Union, offi-

cially dedicated the park with various dignitaries and community leaders in attendance.

For several weeks prior to the Day of Caring, City of Calgary employees donated their professional expertise and labour in laying the groundwork for the project. Approximately twenty businesses—mainly nurseries—also contributed to the project, and the Alberta government's Community Facility Enhancement Program kicked in \$37,000 for supplies and materials.

The fragrant garden is a sensory environment designed to meet the needs of the CNIB's 2600 clients in Calgary. It is, however, more than a park for people with visual impairments, since it's accessible to all people—young and old, sighted and non-sighted, hearing or non-hearing,



An aerial photo shows the CNIB Fragrant Garden taking shape.

walking or wheeling. People will be able to determine their whereabouts by fragrances, sounds, pathway textures, contrasting colours and tactile signs. Sheltered areas of rest along a winding path, along with water and contrasting scents, texture, sights and sounds, will attract people and wildlife.

With each passing season, the

fragrant garden will grow as more plants, birdhouses and a gazebo are added. Ongoing community involvement and sponsorship is needed for the continuing maintenance and success of the garden—if you'd like to donate plants or help out on the end of a shovel when spring arrives, call the CNIB in Calgary at 403/266-8831.

Making the Net Accessible

The federal government has launched a major initiative to ensure its websites are accessible to people with disabilities.

Earlier this year, the U.S. government announced it will soon require all its official websites to be accessible. Canada followed suit, and Industry Canada's Assistive Devices Offices is working in conjunction with the Treasury Board in Ottawa to have Internet accessibility standards adopted within all federal departments.

"I am hoping the policy regulations will be in final form before the end of the government's current fiscal year," says Chuck Letourneau, an Ottawa-based private consultant who is working closely with Industry Canada on the project. "Once the policy is enacted, departments will be given a reasonable phase-in period to achieve compliance."

The standards being promoted were developed and published this past May by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. These guidelines seek to remove barriers that people with physical, visual, hearing and cognitive disabilities may encounter when accessing websites. Specific recommendations contained in the guidelines include text alternatives for people who can't see, audio content captioning for people who can't hear, and full keyboard support for people with physical disabilities who are unable to use a mouse.

Simply stated, an accessible Web page is one that makes its content or service available to every client, regardless of what input or output devices they have at their disposal," says Letourneau, who is co-chair of the working group that developed the W3C standards. "An accessible page is one that looks and sounds and interacts as interestingly as possible for people who can see and hear and use full-colour multimedia-enabled personal computers over fast cable-modems, yet is also usable by someone browsing the site on a three-line non-graphic digital-phone display, or by someone who is blind and using a screen-reader. An accessible page is one that can be navigated as easily by using a keyboard or voice command as by using a mouse. Accessible Web design means designing for all users, not just 'those people with a disability.'"

The guidelines are broken into three "priority" categories: priority one guidelines are those which, if not implemented, prevent people with disabilities from accessing information at a website. If priority two guidelines are not implemented, information can be obtained—but only with great difficulty. Priority three guidelines represent best



practices in the area of accessibility.

In Canada, recommendations placed before Parliament will propose that all federal government website comply with priority one and priority two guidelines.

What is the price tag for building accessibility into a website? "In lay terms, incorporating accessible features should add minimal cost to the design of a new site," says Letourneau. "The designers may have to take some time to learn a few new techniques, and to read and absorb the available resources. But then designers have to learn new techniques all the time to stay competitive, so ignoring accessibility techniques because they are new is no excuse. Learning and implementing accessibility techniques should just be another cost of doing business."

"If you have already designed, paid for, and implemented a disastrously inaccessible Web site, then it might take significant resources to "retrofit" your site. The point being that up front consideration of accessible design should always be cheaper than fixing a design after the fact."

Letourneau says that there are many misconceptions about what is meant by accessible website development. "Accessible design does not mean design for the lowest common denominator. It does not mean using older techniques or supporting text-only pages. In fact, accessible design pushes the envelope of Web technology; it encourages the use of the latest W3C languages specifications."

Currently, there is no legislation in Canada or Alberta that requires websites, government or otherwise, to be accessible to people with disabilities.

Because of the anarchist nature of the Internet, it's unlikely you'll see wholesale adoption of the W3C standards by provincial governments and the private sector anytime soon. But Letourneau points out that individuals can play a role in moving the agenda. "More certainly needs to be done to raise awareness at all levels of government and in industry, but there are only a handful of us doing the work professionally. Consumer and community groups need to target the owners of inaccessible web sites and, I would hope, politely point them to the available resources like the WAI (www.w3.org/WAI/) and the Government of Canada policy when it is published...for now, the Government of Canada Internet Guide (www.canada.gc.ca/programs/guide/index.html) contains useful information about accessible design and hints about where the actual policy is heading."

Scar Stops Nerve Regeneration?

In a recent issue of the *Journal of Neuroscience*, researchers at the Case Western Reserve University recently reported on a study that suggests that scar tissue at the site of injury prevents regeneration of nerve cells.

In the report, Stephen J.A. Davies, Ph.D., Jerry Silver, Ph.D., and colleagues also suggest that white matter beyond the glial scar at the injury site has a far greater built-in ability to support axon regeneration than previously thought.

The researchers transplanted sensory nerve cells from adult mice into degenerating spinal cord tissue beyond the direct site of injury in host rats. Greater than expected growth followed, but growth stopped upon reaching scar tissue.

Growth continued to be possible after three full months of injury, prompting the researchers to conclude that there is still potential for regeneration after this length of time.

Not surprisingly, proteoglycan molecules were found at the exact area of the scar tissue where the regenerating axons stopped growing. In previous studies, these molecules have been strongly correlated with blocking axon regeneration.

The researchers suggest that the study points to the need for more research aimed at overcoming the molecular obstacles in scar tissue. Many current research efforts do not focus on this area; instead, they

are based on the theory that molecules within myelin (the sheath surrounding nerves) signal nerve fibers not to regrow.

Simplifying Barrier Free Home Design

The Accessible Housing Society in Calgary has developed a unique program to assist persons with mobility impairments to design living spaces that meet their accessibility requirements.

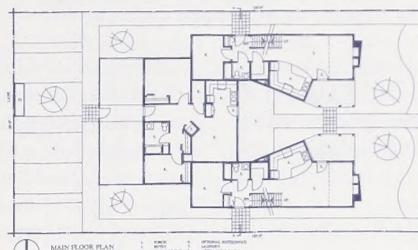
If you have a mobility difficulty that hinders your activities in your home, especially one that requires use of a wheelchair, you've probably been frustrated at times with some aspects of your current design. Perhaps the counters are too high, the stove is difficult to operate, there is insufficient space to turn, electrical outlets are too low to reach, or the bathtub is too hard to get into.

There are excellent books on the subject, offering some great suggestions on designs that will work for different situations. But who will sift through all the information and select the ones

that will help you? Who will decide how to incorporate these things into your present home or plans for your new home? These are two complex tasks, especially if this is a new situation for you.

First, there is the assessment of your own abilities to do various activities, determining what is the best way to perform these things, and finding out what aids exist. For the individual, this represents a great deal of research and books may not provide acceptable solutions to all of the issues you have to deal with. A health care professional, particularly an occupational therapist, is able to provide many of the answers.

Then these ideas must be integrated into a design, drawings and specifications that show how



all of the ideas will actually work and fit into the given space. This is even more difficult for an existing house, since modifications must take into account the feasibility and cost of changing whatever is already in place. Clever design can often minimize the cost of the renovations by using space efficiently and avoiding difficult or expensive items to alter. An architect with experience in barrier free accommodations is able to accomplish these tasks.

The Residential Assessment

and Design (RAD) program integrates these two services. The program is based on the Accessible Housing Society's considerable experience providing care and accommodation to people with physical disabilities. With support from health care

and architectural design professionals on staff, as well as its impressive resource library, the Society develops individualized solutions for its clients—individuals requiring assistance with their homes, or organizations involved in residential design and construction.

The program offers assistance through workshops or direct consultation on specific projects. For more information, contact the Accessible Housing Society at 403/282-1872.

IBOT Raises the Bar for Power Wheelchairs

Technically, IBOT (officially known as the Independence 3000 IBOT™ Transporter) is a wheelchair—but not like one you've ever come across. With astounding ease, it can take a user across the most rugged terrain, up and down stairs, and over curbs. It does this without sacrificing much in the way of size, maneuverability, or turning radius. And as the coup de grâce, the IBOT can stand—and move about—fully balanced on its back wheels, providing the user the necessary height to take part in a world far better suited for people who stand.

The IBOT is the brainchild of Dean Kamen, 48, founder of DEKA Research & Development Corporation in Manchester, NH.

About a decade ago, Kamen saw a wheelchair user at a friend's house who was having all kinds of trouble: first a high counter in an ice cream shop, then a high counter in a supermarket, then a high counter in a restaurant. Kamen set out to help. "I just seemed to me that the fundamental issue was that the world has not been architected for people that are sitting down at 39 inches," he says.

It took Kamen almost ten years to finish the IBOT, but if first impressions count, it's been worth the wait.

IBOT uses gyroscope technology in its standing mode. Sensors continuously and automatically adjust the chair to the user's center of gravity. The result, according to those who have used it, is a sensation of standing up and balancing.

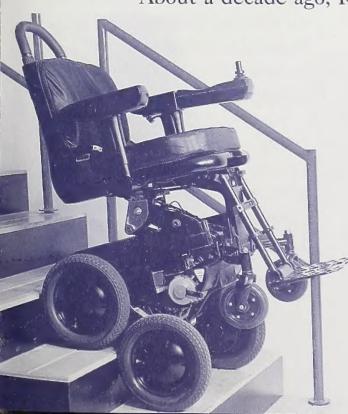
When not standing, a four wheel drive system provides the necessary traction to tackle stairs, curbs or your neighbourhood park.

For now, IBOT is in the design stage and is not yet for sale. In fact, Johnson & Johnson, which owns the rights to IBOT, describes it as an "investigational device." However, the company is putting the IBOT through exhaustive testing. Providing it passes, it will be submitted for approval by the U.S. government within the next 12 months. The company hopes to receive approval for marketing in 18-24 months (it will no doubt be longer before it's available in Canada).

Ken Giacin, general manager for the Johnson & Johnson's Independent Technology division, is enthusiastic about IBOT's future. "We think the device will accommodate 80 percent of the people now using mobility devices. It just gives people such tremendous capability and options. And there is a multiplier too—it will help loved ones, caregivers, spouses."

Expect IBOT to cost about \$30 thousand. If it sounds expensive, well, it is—but not that much more than a fully equipped Permobil Chairman.

For more information, contact the IBOT information line (1-888-IND-3000) or check out the IBOT website (www.indetech.com).



Promoting Disability Management

NIDMAR and its partners take its message across the country

The National Institute of Disability Management and Research (NIDMAR) is a non-profit education, training, and research organization committed to reducing the human, social, and economic costs of disability through workplace-based disability management programs.

Headquartered in Port Alberni on Vancouver Island, NIDMAR has gradually expanded its scope of operations in Canada since it was founded almost a decade ago.

At a ceremony held in Ottawa earlier this spring, about 60 government, employer, labour, workers' compensation, and insurance representatives gathered to officially open NIDMAR's eastern Canada office.

Speaking at the opening, Fredericton MP Andy Scott, who chaired the Federal Task Force on Disability Issues, congratulated NIDMAR for its work and reiterated the importance of keeping injured workers connected to the workplace in order to maintain both their standard of living and their sense of purpose and self-esteem.

NIDMAR's eastern Canada office is supported in large part through a partnership with Ontario's Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB). In exchange for financial support, WSIB has obtained the license to negotiate the delivery of NIDMAR's Certificate Program in Disability Management through post-secondary schools in the province.

In explaining the rationale for partnering with NIDMAR, WSIB President and Chief Executive Officer, David Williams, said at the ceremony that the Board is committed to the mandate of early and safe return to work. "It makes good sense for Ontario's compensation system, it makes good sense for business and employers, but most important of all, it is in the best interest of injured or ill workers."

What the Board likes in particular about NIDMAR, Williams added, is its belief in joint workplace disability management programs. "It's a team effort philosophy that we agree with."

In addition to Ontario, the Ottawa office will promote and provide operational support for delivery of the Certificate Program in Disability Management in Quebec and Atlantic Canada.



One of the goals of disability management is to ease the way for people to get back on the job

The Certificate Program, which is the flagship of NIDMAR's operations, is based on recent experience which shows that the most effective way to help people with a disability return to productive, meaningful employment is to implement jointly managed, workplace-based disability management programs. Such programs have been established in various countries around the world, including Germany, the United States, and Australia. No matter where they have been established, these joint labour/management programs have met with demonstrable success in lowering the human, social, and financial costs of disability.

Consider this quote from Jim Ritchie, Employee Relations Manager, Somass Division, MacMillan Bloedel Limited: "In the two years

that our program has been active, the number of workers with lost time compensation claims dropped from 23 to 11. We cut our lost time accident frequency by nearly half, cut our average number of employees off per day in half, and reduced the number of long-term disability cases from 24 to 16. There are many variables that affect these improved figures but the disability management program is a significant factor."

The Certificate Program in Disability Management was developed in 1995 but has only recently become available in Alberta (see sidebar at right).

The Ottawa ceremony also marked the premiere screening of NIDMAR's latest video, *The Challenge to Lead: The Rewards of Disability Management*, a 23-minute documentary promoting the economic and social benefits of effective, joint disability management programs. Supported through effective participation by key national government, industry, union, and WCB leaders, it focuses on successful operational models and tracks the expansion of national and international acceptance of disability management as a sound economic and social strategy.

For more information on the new office, certificate programs or resources, contact NIDMAR Head Office (250/724-4344) or the NIDMAR Eastern Canada Office (613/834-1360) or check out the NIDMAR website (www.nidmar.ca).

The Certificate Program in Disability Management

The curriculum for the Certificate Program in Disability Management was developed in collaboration with leading national and international specialists from management, labour, the disability community, government, medicine, rehabilitation, and law. Since 1995, the program has been offering graduates the skills and know-how they need to make a difference in their worksites.

It's based on an innovative model of competency-based learning. The competency-based approach focuses on developing practical skills that can be applied in the real world of the Canadian workplace. Students are encouraged to share their workplace experience and expertise, and to instruct each other through participation in joint exercises and projects. The refinement and application of concrete skills, rather than the elaboration and discussion of ideas, is what matters. Graduates leave the program with what they need to establish and maintain successful disability management programs.

The program consists of 174 hours of classroom instruction and is divided into a series of 11 modules; each module examines a general area of competency related directly to the management of disability in the workplace. Modules focus on such topics as organizational skills, marketing, research and information technology, labour relations, return-to-work plans, accommodations, rehabilitation, disability-related legislation, program development, implementation, and evaluation. Methods of delivery include lectures, tutorials, panel discussions, role playing, demonstrations, and a wide variety of individual and group projects.

Taught by leading figures from management, the labour movement, and academics, program graduates have the opportunity to apply their knowledge as soon as they return to their workplaces. Since the first offering of the program in the fall of 1995, graduates have established successful programs in numerous worksites, giving practical effect to the overall program mission of reducing the human, social, and financial cost of disability in Canadian workplaces.

For more detailed information regarding curriculum content, cost, and dates of next offering in Alberta, contact Dave Parkes, Program Manager, **Columbia College**, Calgary at 403/235-9300, ext. 231, or Genevieve Jones, **Grant MacEwan Community College**, Edmonton, at 780/497-5712.

Persistence Pays Off

A success story from EmployAbilities

"In 1998, job prospects for me were scarce," says Geoffrey Highfield, a client of Edmonton employment agency EmployAbilities.

Earlier that year, Geoffrey had been laid off from his job as an Accountant/Systems Manager and was discouraged by the lack of job opportunities he discovered on his own doing his job search. Even though Geoffrey had twenty years of work experience, a Bachelor of Science degree and a general accounting certificate, he could not convince an employer to hire him. Geoffrey believed that his disability, Parkinson's Type Syndrome, might have caused some employers to doubt his abilities.

In September of 1998, Geoffrey heard about EmployAbilities and decided to find out more and its services for people with disabilities. After attending an orientation session, Geoffrey met with an employment counsellor to discuss his specific needs and the type of assistance and support he could expect to receive from the agency.

Over the course of several meetings, Geoffrey determined that he would require retraining if he hoped to secure satisfying and challenging employment. Utilizing the extensive resources at EmployAbilities, Geoffrey researched and

discovered the Network Specialist Program at Network Learning Masters. With the assistance of his employment counsellor, Geoffrey applied for funding and was accepted into the program.

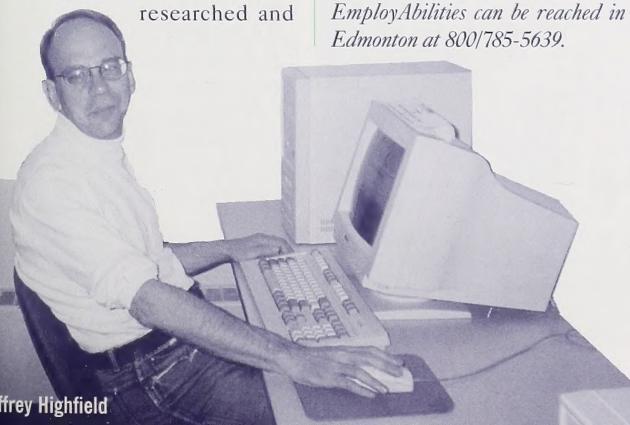
After five months of hard work and many sleepless nights, Geoffrey successfully completed the program and received designations in MCP, CAN with top marks.

With his new skills, Geoffrey returned to EmployAbilities in the spring of 1999, ready to start his job search. He began daily using resources available at EmployAbilities such as WorkINK and other job search sites on the Internet. He also received assistance from the staff at EmployAbilities during his search for employment.

This past August, Geoffrey was flown to Warm Springs, Oregon to interview for a position as MIS Accounting Manager position at Kah-Nee-Ta Resort. Geoffrey was offered the job at the interview and started work one week later.

"This is my dream job and I could not have done it without the help from EmployAbilities," says Geoffrey from his new home in Oregon, where he continues to receive ongoing support from EmployAbilities.

EmployAbilities can be reached in Edmonton at 800/785-5639.



Geoffrey Highfield

Bow Valley College Makes the Grade

Bow Valley College in Calgary specializes in helping learners—including those with disabilities and learning difficulties—get back on track to meet the challenges of the new workplace.

Whether you're embarking on a new career, upgrading education, learning computer software, improving English proficiency or developing professional skills, the college's focus is on outcomes. All full-time career programs are less than a year long and have a work experience component to give learners a hands-on feel for their new career.

Learners with special needs are supported through the college's Learner Support Services (LSS). Learners who apply to a program can set up a meeting with a counsellor to have their specific needs assessed. Once registered, learners have access to a variety of resources including sign language interpreters, note-takers, taped and Braille texts, and adaptive device such as text magnifiers and TDDs. Other services offered by the LSS include needs assessment, identification of effective learning strategies, development of an individualized program plan, and study skills workshops.

In order to stay abreast of learning trends for people with disabilities and learning difficulties, Bow Valley College works closely with The Calgary Learning Centre, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, the Learning Disability Association of Alberta, the CNIB, and other relevant organizations.

Last year, approximately 150 students with disabilities or learning difficulties were registered at Bow Valley College.

For more information, call Bow Valley College at 403/297-4040.

Jobs for Teens with Developmental Disabilities

Teens find their first after-school jobs for many reasons—earning cash for clothes and entertainment, meeting new friends, learning new work skills, building up savings for college or their first car.

A program in Edmonton strives to give teens with developmental disabilities the same opportunities as others when looking for a part-time job. Participants in the Youth Employment Partnership receive support finding and working at a job, and, in the process, learn skills that enhance their future employability as adults.

The program, funded by the Wild Rose Foundation in Partnership with Selections: A Career Support Service, tailors employment situations to the abilities and interests of participants. The teen is supported through the interview and hiring process. Once an employer has hired the teen, a peer support partner—a teen the same age or slightly older—provides on-the-job support for as long as needed. The process is one of mutual learning for both teens.

The Youth Employment Partnership is based on a model program developed and operated by Julie Allan of the Progressive Alternatives Society of Calgary. Since it began five years ago, this program has allowed teens with developmental disabilities to work with a range of employers, including large retailers, multinational food chains and movie theatres. This program has shown that teens with disabilities can achieve real work for real pay given the right support in the workplace.

For more information on the Youth Employment Partnership, contact Wendy Marusin, Project Coordinator, at 780/461-5270.

Dog Day in Court



For all of those who thought the mere presence of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) made the U.S. a paradise for people with disabilities, read on.

In late July, Dr. Frederick A. Shotz, a psychologist and ADA consultant from Gainesville, Florida, decided to attend a high-profile court case in nearby central Florida Lake County.

Upon arrival, Shotz and his service dog Red Zeppelin were repeatedly denied access to the courthouse and the courtroom—despite the fact that federal and state laws both allow for the presence of a service dog in any public building. Access was first denied by Sheriff's Deputies and then, astonishingly, by the presiding judge.

As a consultant to companies and governments on ADA compliance, Shotz knew exactly what his rights were and didn't back down. After a lengthy delay, he demanded to see the judge. Permission was finally granted, although he had to leave Red Zeppelin in the courthouse lobby.

Shotz wheeled up to the bench and addressed the court. He explained to the judge that his refusal to allow Red Zeppelin in the courtroom constituted a federal civil rights violation and a violation of a state statute that carried criminal sanctions.

What followed was a heated exchange, with the judge questioning the usefulness of Shotz's dog in the courtroom setting and Shotz continually reinforcing that his civil rights were being violated. With great reluctance, the judge finally conceded to allow Red Zeppelin into the courtroom, but not without a final caveat: if there were any complaints about a dog in the courtroom, or if any person told a Deputy that the dog's presence made them uncomfortable, Shotz would be ordered to remove the dog from the courtroom.

That might have been the end of the sorry saga—except that the judge never thought to tell the court reporter that this entire lengthy exchange would be off the record. The following morning the Gainesville newspaper ran the story on the front

page of the local section. And with a copy of the official transcript, Shotz has recently instructed his lawyers to proceed with a Title II ADA case against the judge, the 8th Circuit Court of Florida, Levy County, Florida, and the Levy County Sheriff's Office.

"I believe that this will be the first service dog litigation where the violations of state and federal law were actually part of a court record with every spoken word preserved in a format that cannot be questioned," says Shotz.

Shotz is not seeking financial compensation. Instead, he is seeking a commitment from the proper authorities to ensure that no one has to endure a similar ordeal. Specifically, he wants implementation of training programs for all police officers assigned to courthouse security and all Court employees, including all judges in the 8th Circuit, concerning the ADA, the rights of people with disabilities, and the rights of those who use service dogs. He's also seeking removal of architectural barriers that he identified in the courthouse.

Shotz is quick to agree that incidents such as this are far too commonplace. But he points out that legal action under the ADA's provisions can quickly resolve them—he's successfully tackled several companies for lack of ADA compliance, including Wendy's. And he points out that, in Canada, we don't have the luxury of an ADA.

"I actually cancelled a vacation to Canada this year because I realized my service dog wouldn't be welcome," he says. "I'm just one tourist who's disabled and spends thousands and thousands of dollars on travel each year—and doesn't spend it in your country. And that's a sad statement about what Canada is doing to itself in terms of tourism, let alone what it's doing to its own citizens."

In Alberta, there is no specific law that protects the rights of persons with disabilities who use assistive animals, with the exception of the Blind Persons' Rights Act which offers protection only to people who are visually impaired.

Council Member and Guide Dog Denied Access

Shirley Dupmeier, a member of the Premier's Council since 1996, recently had her own close encounter with discrimination.

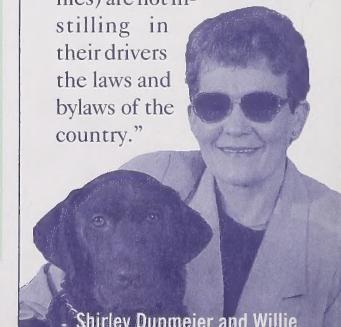
In September, while travelling to a Council Meeting, Shirley and her guide dog Willie were denied access to a Yellow Cab at Edmonton's International Airport.

The driver refused to take Willie, despite the fact that, under the Blind Persons' Rights Act, such a refusal is illegal and subject to penalties of up to \$1,000:

(1) No person, directly or indirectly, alone or with another, by himself or by the interposition of another, shall (a) deny to any person the accommodation, services or facilities available in any place to which the public is customarily admitted... for the reason that he is a blind person accompanied by a guide dog.

After a complaint was filed with Yellow Cab, Shirley received a letter of apology in which a representative wrote: "We sincerely regret the inconvenience caused and the difficult situation you were put in...we apologize for this incident and through a process of continued education for our drivers, we will work together to ensure that such an incident is never repeated."

Unfortunately for Shirley and other guide dog users, this isn't a unique incident. "It happens far too often," she says. "It's getting better, but it's not good yet. I think the problem is that (taxi companies) are not instilling in their drivers the laws and bylaws of the country."



New Service Offers Travel Assistance

Travel Care Companions is a unique service for travellers with special needs. The company matches its clients' personal needs with experienced companions who have been carefully screened and tested to handle a wide range of potential travel and social scenarios. All companions are CPR certified, licensed and bonded, including background checks. Many are regis-

tered therapists or RNs, depending on the requirements of clients. Above all, companions are chosen for their trustworthiness, attitude, disposition, and resourcefulness.

Travel Care Companions' services encompass all types of domestic and foreign travel. For more information, call 760/930-9006, or visit the website: (www.travelcarecompanions.com).

In Support of Recreation

Recreation: to recover from illness, to revive, to refresh, to make anew (Webster's Encyclopedic Dictionary of the English Language, 1988)

Several years ago, I experienced a crisis of confidence in my life. This crisis is not rare among people with disabilities, as the experiences of daily reality clash with memories of times when the barriers, frustrations and efforts of disability were unknown and unreal. I realized that I would have to do something to change my attitude toward myself and my ability to find joy in life.

Instinctively, I turned to recreation. I volunteered with several organizations and eventually realized that there was a dearth of opportunities for people with significant disabilities. This led me to form several organizations that would provide a way for us to work with many others in similar circumstances.

The benefits of being actively involved in recreational pursuits, and helping to organize them, exceeded my wildest expectations. I had experiences that I would probably never have had as an able-bodied person: flying ultra-light airplanes, sailing solo in a sailboat and travelling through forests in specially-designed vehicles. The remarkable changes I have seen myself and others undergo has convinced me of the power of recreation to heal, encourage and uplift us. Through recreation, many people with disabilities have gathered the strength and desire to continue to build their lives and careers.

For this reason, I believe that an investment in recreation for people with disabilities is an investment in the working future, and that governments need to recognize the potential of recreation as part of an overall plan for integration and inclusion. Recreation helps create the type of health, vibrant community

that turns people from dependent, self-doubting individuals, into self-determining productive citizens. It helps to counter-balance the often demoralizing, dependency-creating side effects of a well-meaning support system.

I have always considered recreation to be a very serious matter. Sometimes publicly viewed as frivolous and outside the proper concern of advocates and activists, it in fact plays an important role in our lives.

Participation can send powerful messages—both to oneself and to others. It can renew a passion for life which can translate into other personal successes. In addition to being a catalyst for personal growth, it serves as an outlet for the energies and frustrations from the constant challenges faced by people with disabilities. And recreation offers a chance to socialize with others sharing common interests, forge bonds within the community,

and build strength—physical, mental and emotional.

Recreational participation can also open up career and volunteer opportunities. Indeed, employers view recreation as a positive indicator of a well-rounded individual, while in others it can inspire respect and support. Participation can open lines of communication between what are often perceived as two distinct communities: the able-bodied and people with disabilities. It can have a role in breaking stereotypes that portray people with disabilities as passive and sedentary.

But, of course, beyond this serious analysis, it is important to remember...recreation can be a lot of fun! From commonplace to extreme activities, the value of recreation lies in its ability to transport the participant to new heights of enjoyment and fulfillment. As people with disabilities continue to seek access to areas of limited participation, more opportunities will be created to suit the interests and abilities of a wider range of people.

I encourage every reader to explore the available recreational options and to create new opportunities for participation. I also call upon supportive elements of our community—government, industry and agencies—to get behind local initiatives to provide more opportunities for recreation for people with disabilities.

Access Challenge Gets Participants Off Beaten Track

Access Challenge is an event that brings able-bodied and physically disabled people together in teams to undertake a wilderness journey. Access Challenge is part adventure, part

Sian Blyth. "Our aim is to show people we could give them access to the wilderness." She adds that next year's event will be bigger and more competitive.

Access Challenge is made possible by the Trailrider, a vehicle designed specifically for transporting persons with severe disabilities in remote areas with the help of able-bodied team members. The Trailrider has two handles in the front and back, a bucket in the middle with appropriate seating and a single pneumatic tire. The result is a light, portable, human-powered, environmentally-friendly all-terrain vehicle.

Access Challenge is organized by the British Columbia Mobilities Opportunities Society, founded by Sam Sullivan. For more information, call 604/688-6464 or check out the BCMOS website (www.reachdisability.org/bcmos/).



Sam Sullivan (sitting) and friends

The event was scheduled to last three days, but severe weather limited participants to just two days.

"All the teams completed in the sense that they worked together so well," says event coordinator

Sam Sullivan is the founder of four non-profit societies dedicated to improving the quality of life of people with disabilities: Tetra Society of North America, Disabled Sailing, Adapted Music and the Mobility Society. He has also served as a Vancouver City Councillor since 1993.

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VOLUNTEERING

Calgary Woman Brings Relief to Trinidad's Disabled

Four years ago, Calgarian Vivien Gonzales began spending the winter months in Trinidad and Tobago. A quadriplegic since 1983, Gonzales was simply in search of refuge from Alberta's harsh winters. But with each visit, she became more aware of how disadvantaged people with disabilities—and particularly children—are in this tiny Caribbean country.

"The disabled are still quite hidden down there because of lack of transportation and, of course, everything has steps," says Gonzales, a Christian who worked as a registered nurse in Calgary for 20 years before a car collision forced her into retirement.

By the time Gonzales spent her second winter in Trinidad, she felt she had something to con-

tribute. That year, she convinced the local chapter of Disabled Persons International to meet and lay the groundwork for developing a handi-bus service. "It took six weeks for the board to meet because the members didn't have transportation to get to the meeting," she says, adding that she is optimistic that a system is moving closer to reality.

That was the beginning of Gonzales' one-woman crusade, and she became actively involved with a school for children with disabilities, a vocational school for adults with disabilities, and several other worthy projects. Last winter, she delivered her crowning achievement: a shipping container chock full of 67 used wheelchairs and medical supplies.

The recycled wheelchairs,



Vivien Gonzales

which Gonzales describes as almost new, were donated by Alberta Aids to Daily Living. The shipment also included more than 100 wheels and rims. Calgary's Home Care Medical contributed two van loads of equipment, such as urinary drainage supplies and

bath and toilet seats.

Gonzales explains that wheelchairs—particularly for children—are desperately needed in the country, and recalls how grateful recipients of the donated wheelchairs were. "We got people out of bed that hadn't been out of bed for years. It really broke my heart up. I just like doing things for people. I was a registered nurse for 20 years. You see somebody hurting, and you think, 'Gosh, I can do something about that,' and you just do it."

Gonzales continues to seek donations of equipment and funds to help offset shipping costs (she's currently paying off a \$4000 loan required to ship last year's shipment). For more information, contact her at 403-262-4749.

Toys for Children with Disabilities

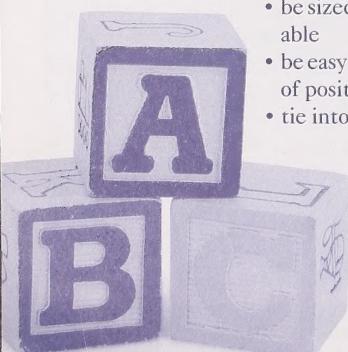
Gift givers are often afraid of selecting the "wrong" toy at Christmas time, and many children with disabilities find pajamas and socks under the tree—and not the toy of their dreams.

The National Lekotek Center is an American non-profit organization that promotes accessible play for children with disabilities and their families. The Center offers a top ten list of tips for buying Christmas gifts for children with disabilities. Suitable toys should:

- have multi-sensory appeal (lights, sounds, colours, etc.)
- provide a challenge without frustrating steps to activate
- be adjustable for size, volume, speed and level of difficulty
- provide opportunities for success regardless of child's level of ability
- match both the chronological and developmental age, as well as interests
- allow for creativity, uniqueness and choice-making
- allow the child to actively participate and interact with others during use

- be sized appropriately, durable, and washable
- be easy to store and can be used in a variety of positions
- tie into popular books and movies.

The National Lekotek Center has also teamed up with Toys "R" Us to produce the *Guide for Differently-Abled Kids!* This guide is available for free by calling 847/328-0001.



calendar of events

Nov 25 - 27, 1999

The Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta (Calgary Chapter) presents the 20th Annual Provincial Conference: LD>2000. Location: Westin Calgary. Theme: three day conference dealing with a wide variety of subjects relating to learning disabilities experienced by children and adults. Contact: Learning Disabilities Association of Alberta (Calgary Chapter) at 403/283-6606.

May 7 - 9, 2000

The Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission on behalf of the Canadian Association of Statutory Human Rights Agencies presents a National Human Rights Conference. Location: Banff. Theme: Building a human rights culture: tools for transformation. Contact ICDR at 800/378-3199.

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